

Did Epicurus Advise Marriage or Not? Diogenes Laertius Text Difficulty

Post by “Eikadistes” of July 2, 2021 at 12:32 PM

Quote

“Just as new, and in keeping with this spirit, is Epicurus’ attempt to create an alternative community for philosophers in which normal life could be pursued along with philosophy. Philosophy no longer criticizes or serves the dominant culture; it turns its back on it, secedes from it, and, most importantly, puts something positive in its place. That Epicureanism was for these reasons unprecedented seems to have been clear to such contemporaries of Epicurus as Damoxenus and Arcesilaus. For them, and for others such as Timon or Menippus who were caught up in the old antagonistic relationship of philosophy and society, Epicurus’ vision was either infuriating or amusing. For others, more open to change, the Epicurean alternative was attractive indeed.

The **Epicurean sanction of marriage** is a first indication of the new direction taken by Epicurus in solving the problem of accommodating philosophy and society. By **admitting women to the school and encouraging marriage and child-rearing**, the status of the Epicurean philosopher was no longer decided in terms of the dominant culture but in terms proper to the Epicurean experiment in reconstructing a past stage of history. At what was in Epicurean eyes the most desirable stage of history, **men and women formed foedera** based on free will and mutual interests. It was perhaps inevitable that when it came to putting this idea into practice, the women the Epicureans sought for marriage were not the eligible women of the community at large but the female students of the school, who were in a position to make their *foedera* for philosophically correct reasons. The number of such women seems to have been sufficiently large, at least in Epicurus’ day, and was at any rate far greater than it seems to have been in the other schools, where a Hipparchia or Axiothea – both significantly wont to dress in male attire, as if to deny their femininity – is only occasionally to be found. The *hetairai* Boidion, Leontion, Hedeia, Nikidion, Mammarrion, Demelata, Erotion, and Philainis were connected with the school. Metrodorus’ sister Batis married Idomeneus (p. 368.5 Usener); Leonteus married Themista (D.L. 10.26). We know that Metrodorus and Polyainos were married and had children, although we do not know the names of their wives (D.L. 10.26). It would be hard to overemphasize the appeal of a school that was willing to grant females full rights of participation in all of its activities. It would have been attractive both to women inclined toward philosophy and, perhaps more importantly, to men who sought the companionship of

such sympathetic and intelligent women.

The participants in the school were **not only encouraged to marry and raise children but also to dwell together in the Garden** (D.L. 10.10 citing two sources). The arrangement is not otherwise encountered in a philosophical school. The Epicurean school was thus both an education enterprise and a genuine community where, we may assume, all the normal activities of life took place alongside learning and study. Here, then, is another reason why Epicurus deprived himself of the legal loophole of the religious association: he conceived of his organization as an alternative *polis*, not simply as a specialized part of the traditional city-state. An ancient and non-Epicurean witness, Numenius, seems to be reporting Epicurus' success in this with an observer's disinterested eye when he says (*apud* Eusebius, *Praep. Ev.* 14.5.3) that 'Epicureans in the Garden resemble people living in a well-organized state.'

(Frischer, *The Sculpted World, Epicureanism and Philosophical Recruitment in Ancient Greece*, 61-63)